

Fort Utah Gave Provo a Colorful Beginning

(Final of two articles)

By N. LA VERL CHRISTENSEN

For a year after its establishment in the spring of 1849, Fort Utah (first located south of Provo River a short distance east of the present Geneva Road) was the only Mormon outpost in Utah Valley.

As the colonization program began to develop, settlements were organized at present cities of Lehi, American Fork, Pleasant Grove, Springville, Spanish Fork, Payson, and others.

In that first year and for a year or two after — until population grew and pioneers changed Indian depredations to settle on private farms — community life in Provo pretty well centered within Fort Utah.

The colony grew up, to begin with, under ecclesiastical organization and administration, the settlers enacting a few necessary laws by their vote at public meetings.

First Tannery

Farming activities began to expand from the 225 acres planted immediately surrounding the fort that first spring. Industries began to appear on a limited basis. Samuel Clark built a tannery within the fort in the fall of 1849 and produced the first shoe leather.

There were many deaths at Fort Utah. A cemetery was established on a natural mound some distance west of Fort Utah in a place called South Fort Field (owned today by John S. Lewis of Orem).

(While plowing on this property in the spring of 1912, Alfred Harding came across some bodies, according to the writings of the late Andrew Jensen, assistant church historian. He notified Provo City officials and the bodies were reburied in the Provo City Cemetery.)

Visit By Brigham

Fort Utah had some distinguished visitors in mid-September

1849. As Brigham Young and his counselors in the Mormon First Presidency, Heber C. Kimball and Willard Richards, neared in carriages, the old cannon belched out a welcome.

The visitors forded the river and were met "by all the inhabitants" on the south bank. "We drove inside," wrote Thomas Bullock, "who accompanied the visitors," and were "hospitably welcomed by the people."

Inside the fort, Mr. Bullock related, was a raised platform on which the cannon was placed. "Under the platform were four tables, covered with the good things of the earth. We who had just arrived sat down to three tables and partook to our satisfaction. . .

Site For City

On Monday, Sept. 17 — two days after arrival — Brigham Young and party rode eastward to look for a location for a city. They found "a very eligible place" about two miles east of the fort, where the city of Provo ultimately was located.

The General Assembly of the Provisional State of Deseret approved creation of Utah County Jan. 31, 1850 and named "Provo" the county seat — apparently the first use, says one historian, of that name for the settlement. (It wasn't until 1852, following establishment of the Territory of Utah, that the county seems to have been actually organized.) Provo was granted a charter by the General Assembly of Deseret Feb. 6, 1851, the charter being patterned after that of Nauvoo, Ill.

Indian War

In late 1849 and early 1850, Indian depredations — including

theft and killing of cattle and threats on the settlers' lives — culminated in a three-day war starting Feb. 8, in which a combined force of Salt Lake and Utah Valley militiamen moved against the Utes in their fortified winter camp in the Provo River Bottoms area.

The Indians were routed with heavy losses. The whites lost one man, Joseph Higbee, son of Isaac Higbee, president of the Fort Utah colony. At least 18 of the whites were wounded. They received medical treatment at Fort Utah where the log house of Chauncey Turner was converted into a hospital. Dr. Blake of the Stansbury federal expedition rendered medical aid.

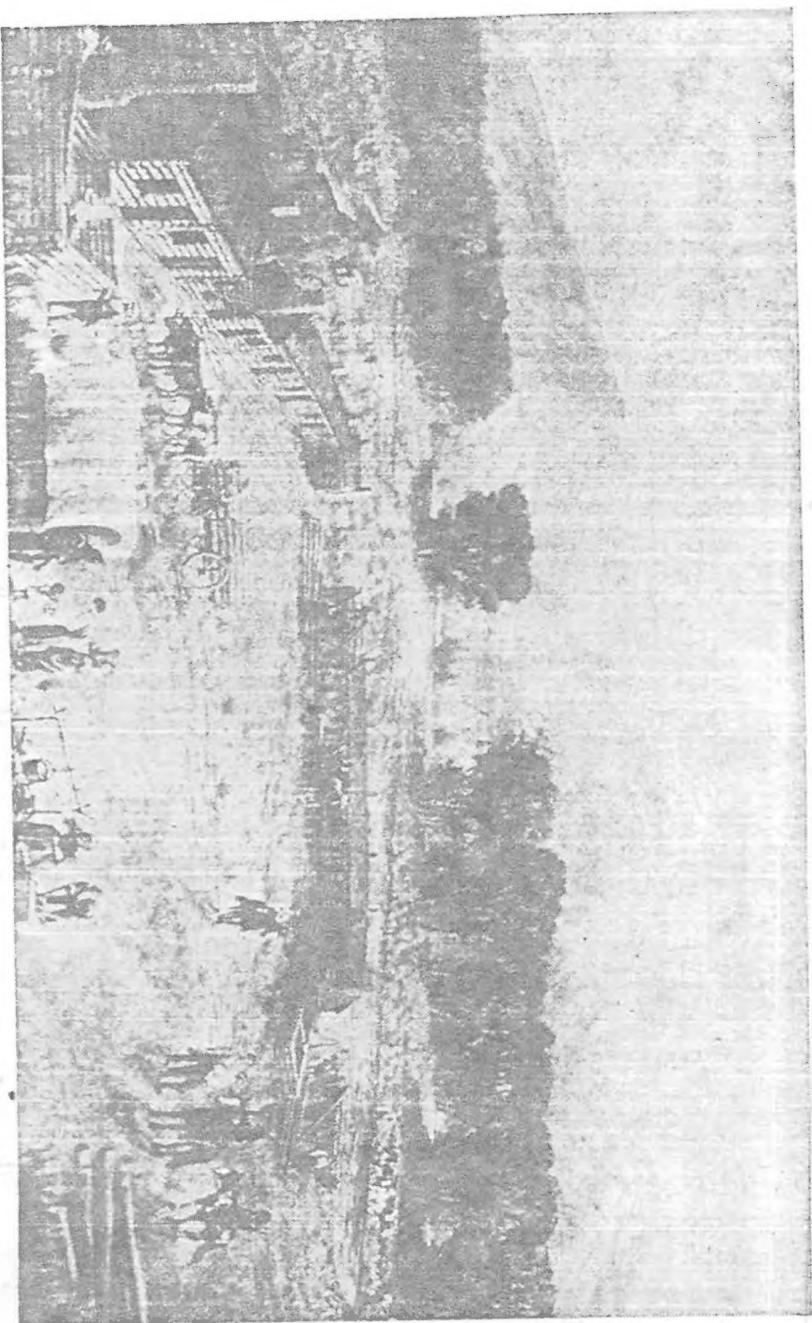
In April 1850, the settlers began to move eastward, above the Provo River flood line, and to establish the second fort at the present North (Soviet) Park area — first on a small

basis, then expanding the fort later.

Fort Saved

(Soviet Park received its name from friendly Chief Sowietle who is credited with saving Fort Utah settlers from massacre at the hands of warlike Chief Walker in the summer of 1850. Walker, the story goes, was encamped nearby with 400 braves. When he threatened to wipe out the whites, Sowietle revealed the plot to Isaac Higbee, then sent word to Walker that "when you move you will find me and my men in the fort defending." The attack never took place.)

Fort Utah was the beginning and a colorful chapter in Provo history. Provo City has acquired the site of the original fort. This 14-acre tract will be developed into a public park by the Utah Lake Lions Club in cooperation with the city.



THE SECOND FORT UTAH, located at the site of Provo's present-day North (Sowiette) Park, is depicted in construction stage in this photocopy by Joseph M. Boel of a painting by artist Samuel Jepperson which hangs in the Pioneer Museum at Provo. The original Fort Utah (sometimes called Fort Provo) was built in 1849 south of Provo River and east of the

present Geneva Road. The one at North Park was established a year later. (Most material for this and the preceding article was taken from Provo histories by J. Marinus Jensen; the Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration; the Daughters of Utah Pioneers; and the LDS Church Journal History)